
The avifauna of Benin: additions and corrections

Robert J. Dowsett and Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire

L'avifaune du Bénin : additions et corrections. Depuis la publication de la liste des oiseaux du Bénin par Dowsett (1993), 58 espèces ont été ajoutées à l'avifaune du pays dans diverses publications. Cet article présente 74 espèces de plus nouvelles pour le pays et confirme le statut de quelques autres incluses par Dowsett (1993), mais pour lesquelles il manquait une localité ou des détails convaincants. Par la même occasion, nous rejetons 28 espèces qui nous paraissent improbables ou mal identifiées, et présentons une liste de 28 autres espèces dont la présence au Bénin est probable mais nécessite confirmation—en particulier, les espèces notées dans un parc trans-frontalier mais sans préciser de quel côté de la frontière elles ont été vues, et d'autres pour lesquelles nous manquons de détails convaincants. Nous acceptons maintenant un total de 542 espèces pour le pays.

Summary. Since the list of the birds of Benin was published by Dowsett (1993), 58 species have been added to the country's avifauna in various publications. This paper presents another 74 species that are new and confirms some others included in Dowsett (1993) but which lacked a locality or supporting details. We also discuss 28 species that we believe have been claimed erroneously, and we list 28 that we consider require confirmation—in particular species listed from a transfrontier park, but not clearly credited to Benin, and others for which convincing details are not available. We now accept a total of 542 species for Benin.

Benin (formerly Dahomey) has received little attention in the ornithological literature, and the only annotated list purporting to include all bird species known from the country is that by Dowsett (1993). Since then, a number of species have been added to the national list, in a series of articles (summarised below), but many remain undocumented. Some 20 species were added during a visit by us of six weeks (in January–February 2009) to the transition zone forests of the south, with a few days further north in the Forêt Classée de Ouari Maro, near Bétérou, and two weeks (February 2010) in the two northern national parks, Pendjari and 'W'. Among resident birdwatchers, mention must be made in particular of P. M. Claffey who lived in the Bétérou area (Borgou Province) in 1987–99, and visited Cotonou for a total of ten months in 2001–02. Several observers will be continuing field work in the country, making it premature to discuss in detail species' distributions. This paper is an initial attempt to bring the Benin list up to date.

Three publications deal with two transfrontier national parks, Pendjari-Arly and 'W' du Niger (e.g. Green & Sayer 1979, Crisler *et al.* 2003, Balança *et al.* 2007), but it is not clear which species are recorded from the Benin side. As regards the Pendjari, we do not know which species in the list presented by Delvingt *et al.* (1989) were observed by those authors, or were

merely repeated from Green & Sayer (1979). The list for Arly-Pendjari in Balança *et al.* (2007) includes records from an unpublished report (Grell *et al.* 2005: G. Balança pers. comm.), but there are a number of improbable species there for which we have been unable to obtain details. Many of the species accepted for Benin by Dowsett (1993) on the basis of Green & Sayer (1979) have since been confirmed, and those that have not are listed below in a section on species requiring confirmation:

We exclude mention here of species mapped in the standard literature as apparently occurring in Benin (e.g. Borrow & Demey 2001, 2004, Fry & Keith 2004 and earlier volumes), if no locality has appeared in print, or anonymous reports (e.g. in Dodman & Taylor 1996 and others of the series). We have taken into account all published records we know of, and any not referred to here should be assumed to be unaccepted.

Initials of observers: B. Boedts (BB), R. A. Cheke (RAC), P. M. Claffey (PMC), M. Cocker (MC), C. de Vaan (CdV), R. J. Dowsett (RJD), F. Dowsett-Lemaire (FDL), S. Feys (SF), A. Fossé (AF), A. Giannotti (AG), A. A. Green (AAG), J. Gonin (JG), J. Goossens (JGoo), M. Langeveld (ML), J. & S. Merz (J&SM), W. Plomp (WP), B. Portier (BP), I. van Woersem (IvW) and J. F. Walsh (JFW). Observations by FDL and RJD together are designated by pers. obs. All

photographs mentioned have been examined by us, and are archived in the *Tauraco* databases (to be deposited eventually at the Edward Grey Institute, University of Oxford). Copies of tape-recordings by FDL have been deposited at the British Library in London. Some of these observations have appeared in *Bull. ABC's* Recent Reports.

Additions to the avifauna of Benin

The following list includes 74 species (indicated by +) which are additions to the Benin list in Dowsett (1993), plus a few that were accepted there, but which require comment.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (+)

In February 2005, AG had good views of one on the Niger near Karimama, alongside the much smaller Long-tailed Cormorant *P. africanus*. She obtained an acceptable photograph.

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* (+)

Records in the north include three on the Niger River between the Mékrou and Sota outfalls, on 1 December 1987 (JFW), and one towards Mékrou Tounga, Monsey district, on 22 February 2009 (AG). Regularly seen in the south, observations which ruled out the possibility of misidentified dark-phase Western Reef Egrets *E. gularis* including a maximum of 90 at Lac Nokoué, on 17 February 2010 (BP) and birds photographed at Ganvié, where 40–50 were present on 22–23 November 2010 (JG).

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* (+)

One (white morph) carefully identified at Ouidah lagoon, on 24 January 2009 (pers. obs.), and records of dark-phase birds on or near the coast include a maximum of ten at Bouches du Roi, on 12 November 2010 (JG, photographed). A total of 115 reported during the 1996 Waterfowl Census (Dodman & Taylor 1996), but the caveat regarding identification of Black Herons and Western Reef Egrets (and indeed Little Egret *E. garzetta*) applies.

White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus* (+)

Bouet (1914) listed this species from Bodjécali on the Niger, but this was not repeated in Bouet (1955). However, there is an undated specimen of *T. leuconotus* in the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNHN) in Paris, labelled 'Botjécali,

Dahomey' (P. Boussès *in litt.* 2009). Listed for the Parc National (P.N.) du 'W' by Balança *et al.* (2007), but not by Crisler *et al.* (2003).

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (+)

One hundred were counted on the Niger River between Mékrou and Sota outfalls on 1 December 1987, with a single at the Chutes de Koudou on the same day (JFW), and one on the Pendjari River near Porga on 2 December 1987 (JFW). Dowsett (1993) was unaware of these records.

Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini* (+)

One perched by the Ouémé River in the Agbassa area on 20 February 2009 (pers. obs.), and seen in Pendjari and the adjoining hunting area in March–April 2006 (Salewski 2007a) and March 2008 (J&SM). Also seen at Tanguiéta on 29 May 2009 (J&SM). An adult near Mare Fougou, P.N. de la Pendjari on 28 January 2010 was photographed (AF *et al.*; Fig. 1). The observers were careful to exclude the possibility of Short-toed Snake Eagle *C. gallicus*. Green & Sayer (1979) stated that Thiollay (1977) reported the species from Pendjari but we see no mention of this record therein.



Figure 1. Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini*, adult, P.N. de la Pendjari, Benin, 28 January 2010 (Alain Fossé)

Circaète de Beaudouin *Circaetus beaudouini*, adulte, P.N. de la Pendjari, Bénin, 28 janvier 2010 (Alain Fossé)

Long-tailed Hawk *Urotriorchis macrourus* (+)

One sang a few times (tape-recorded) while flying through swamp forest at Lokoli (opposite Lokoli village) on 9–10 February 2009, at 07.30 hrs on both days (pers. obs.). By 10th it was calling

in degraded *Raphia* swamp further south, and was not heard on 11th. The bird was probably no more than a wanderer. The species is known from Ilaro (06°53'N 03°01'E), 40 km east of the Nigerian border (Button 1967–68). Cheke (2001) lists this species in the Guineo-Congolian biome table for Benin, but without a locality: this was based on an unpublished report from the Lama (R. A. Cheke *in litt.* 2009), which the observer has since withdrawn as a misidentification.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* (+)

One on the road between Natitingou and Boukoumbé on 17 January 1999 (PMC & MC), a pale-morph bird north of Kountori, Atacora, on 23 January 2007 (J&SM), and another pale-morph individual in Pendjari on 29 December 2009 (BP). Thiollay (1977) reported seeing three in the north, but without providing details.

Cassin's Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus africanus* (+)

In the Forêt Classée de la Lama, one singing near layon (transect) 12 on 31 January 2009 (at 09.00 hrs) and one singing over forest along layon 11 on 1 March (at 09.55 hrs)—the characteristic *ku-ku-wee, ku-ku-wee* (FDL). A large nest in a 30-m tall *Ceiba* nearby (layon 11) might have belonged to this eagle. The nest was at a height of 22–23 m and was *c.*1 m in diameter. First record for Benin; a sighting mentioned (without details) in an unpublished report by M. Waltert for the Lama was not repeated by Waltert & Mühlenberg (1999). The species is common in the forests of the Dahomey Gap on the Ghana / Togo border (pers. obs.), and it is known from Ipake (Ilaro), 40 km east of the Nigerian border (Elgood *et al.* 1994).

Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* (+)

One seen and heard singing briefly near layon 15 in the Lama on 4 February 2009, at 15.00 hrs (RJD), is the first acceptable record for the country. Lama is the only forest block of sufficient size in Benin to support a pair of this large monkey-eating eagle. Not found during a second visit by us later that month; perhaps a vagrant from Nigeria. Claffey (1999c) reported two juveniles together, calling, in the dry woodland of the Forêt Classée de l'Ouémé Supérieur, but if this species were present in what appears to be unsuitable habitat he would surely have heard the song of the adult. Moreover,

Crowned Eagles raise just a single young, and the occurrence of this species in the Upper Ouémé requires confirmation.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* (+)

A juvenile marked with a satellite transmitter on Sardinia (Italy) was tracked through northern Benin on southbound passage towards Madagascar (Gschweng *et al.* 2008). It entered Benin on 10 November 2004 at *c.*10°07'N 00°59'E (i.e. near Boukoumbé), then moved eastwards north of the Forêt Classée de l'Ouémé Supérieur to leave the country on 12 November, roughly east of Nikki (taken from a series of dates and coordinates *per* M. Gschweng *in litt.* 2009).

Ahanta Francolin *Francolinus achantensis* (+)

There are numerous observations north to at least Ouari Maro (Claffey 1995; pers. obs.). Dowsett (1993) had listed the reports by Bouet (1914) and Brunel (1958)—the latter only heard—as requiring confirmation.

Savile's Bustard *Lophotis savilei* (+)

Photographed in P.N. du 'W', between Kofouno and Mare 25, in January 2005 (AG; Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Savile's Bustard *Lophotis savilei*, P.N. du 'W', Benin, January 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Outarde de Savile *Lophotis savilei*, P.N. du 'W', Bénin, janvier 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

One photographed at Bouches du Roi on 12 November 2010 (JG). Twice reported at Guézin: three feeding with a large number of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* on 21 January 1994, and a group of ten on 5 February 1996

(PMC). There is a report of 120 in Dodman & Taylor (1996); this exceptional total, and, even more remarkably, the 2,000 reported from Keta lagoon in south-east Ghana (Cheke & Walsh 1996) were probably misidentified Black-winged Stilts, which raises doubts about the reliability of some other figures presented in various Waterfowl Census reports. Dowsett (1993) listed this species from Benin on the basis of Bannerman (1953), but the record there was not from Grand-Popo, but from Klein Popo (Anécho) in Togo.

Grey Pratincole *Glareola cinerea*

One at a small pond at Bétérou on 22 July 1997 (PMC). Up to 30 were seen on the beach in front of the Sheraton Hotel, Cotonou, between 10 July and November 1999 (BB, PMC); and the species was photographed in the same area on 25 September 2010 (BP; Fig. 3). A pair on the Niger, just upstream of Malanville, on an unknown date (J. F. Walsh *in litt.* 1988).



Figure 3. Grey Pratincole *Glareola cinerea*, Cotonou, Benin, 25 September 2010 (Bruno Portier)

Glaréole grise *Glareola cinerea*, Cotonou, Bénin, 25 septembre 2010 (Bruno Portier)

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* (+)

Several recorded on successive days at Grand-Popo on 19–21 November 1995, including immatures, in an area of dry swamp in front of the Auberge (PMC), and an immature at Cotonou on 24 September 2010 (BP). In the north, an adult in breeding plumage at Kakikoka Dam, Bétérou, on 8 April 1998 (PMC), and also seen in the Pendjari (Salewski 2007a).

Forbes's Plover *Charadrius forbesi* (+)

Most records are between December and April (up to ten birds), from the coast near Ouidah (PMC) north to the central Atacora (ML). There are also

wet season reports, from Datori in July 2003 and Tchaourou on 22 August 2009 (J&SM). A specimen was collected at Abomey on 2 February by 'Vaterlot' (= Emmanuel-Georges Waterlot) (Didier & Boudarel 1913, a reference that seems to have been overlooked by all recent authors). A specimen reported as *Aegialitis tricollaris*, collected at Zimvo (Zinvié) in January (Bocage 1892) was perhaps *C. forbesi*, but it would have been destroyed in the fire at the Lisbon museum in 1975.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (+)

Present in small numbers on the coast, with a maximum of nine at Bouches du Roi on 12 November 2010 (JG), and the latest there on 1 April 1994 (PMC).

Sanderling *Calidris alba* (+)

Frequently seen on the coast, in groups of up to 15 at Bouches du Roi and Cotonou on dates between 11 September (2010, photo: BP) and 22 April (1996: PMC).

Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (+)

On 17 February 2010, one was flushed from the wet grass and swamp areas of Plaine du Sô (BP). One was seen in the Pendjari on 19 November 2010 (JG). The observers concerned noted the deeper voice and short bill of this stocky species, as opposed to Common Snipe *G. gallinago*. Dowsett (1993) questioned the sight record in Brunel (1958) from Lac Nokoué, given the difficulty that exists in identifying snipe in the field.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (+)

Small numbers (up to six) in December–March at Guézin (J&SM, PMC). Groups of 30 on the Niger at Bello Tounga, near Karimama, on 6 January 2005 (photographed) and 1 October 2006 (AG).

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* (+)

Small numbers (up to three) on the coast between 6 November (2010, when photographed by BP near Cotonou: Fig. 4) and 1 April (1994, one at Bouches du Roi: PMC).

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* (+)

Nine were well seen at Bouches du Roi on 12 November 2010 (JG)—the observer distinguished



Figure 4. Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Cotonou, Benin, 6 November 2010 (Bruno Portier)

Barge rousse *Limosa lapponica*, Cotonou, Bénin, 6 novembre 2010 (Bruno Portier)



Figure 5. Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*, Niger River at Karimama, Benin, March 2008 (Agnès Giannotti)

Sterne hansel *Sterna nilotica*, fleuve Niger à Karimama, Bénin, mars 2008 (Agnès Giannotti)



Figure 6. A group of Royal Terns *Sterna maxima* and Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis* at Cotonou, Benin, 9 September 2010, including ringed birds (Bruno Portier)

Un groupe de Sternes royales *Sterna maxima* et Sternes caugek *S. sandvicensis* à Cotonou; Bénin, 9 septembre 2010, avec des oiseaux bagués (Bruno Portier)

them from nearby Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*, something that is not clear from previous reports (e.g. Dodman & Taylor 1996, Grell *et al.* 2005).

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* (+)

One was well seen at Cotonou on 21–23 November 2010 (BP, WP) and one at Bouches du Roi on 12 November 2010 (JG). Other reports of singles are: in the marsh in front of the Auberge at Grand-Popo on 26–29 April 1995, and near a group of Spotted Redshanks *T. erythropus* at Guézin on 6 December 1996 (PMC). Inland records have been published without supporting details (e.g. Niaouli: van den Akker 2003a).

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* (+)

One at Grand-Popo on 22 April 1995 (PMC). Three at the lagoon in Cotonou on 31 March 1999 (JGoo). One seen at Guézin on 18 January

2007 (J&SM). In the north, one in the Pendjari on 18 November 2010 (JG), and the species was photographed on the Niger River near Karimama in January 2005 and March 2008 (AG; Fig. 5).

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (+)

A few records from the coast and Ganvié of small numbers, between 27 August (2003: SF) and December (2004: J&SM).

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* (+)

Frequently seen on the coast in all months, often in groups of 10–25, with a maximum of 369 in Cotonou harbour on 6 November 2010 (BP). Ranges inland some 15 km to the north side of Lac Nokoué (AF *et al.*). A group photographed at Cotonou on 9 September 2010 included a ringed bird (BP; Fig 6), presumably originating from a colony in north-west Africa.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* (+)

A bird ringed in Dublin, Republic of Ireland, on 11 July 1997 was recovered in Département Atlantique (c.06°35'N 02°15'E) on 13 December 1997 (*Tauraco* database, confirmed by Mrs J. Clark, British Trust for Ornithology, *in litt.* 2010).

Damara Tern *Sterna balaenarum* (+)

Up to 53 were on the beach at Cotonou harbour on 9–17 September 2010 (BP, WP; Fig. 7). Cheke (2001) mentioned up to 200 birds at the Bouches du Roi, but confusion with Little Tern *S. albifrons* is possible; JG had good views of four there on 12 November 2010.



Figure 7. Damara Tern *Sterna balaenarum*, Cotonou harbour, Benin, 11 September 2010 (Bruno Portier)

Sterne des baleiniers *Sterna balaenarum*, port de Cotonou, Bénin, 11 septembre 2010 (Bruno Portier)

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* (+)

Six in partial breeding dress on the Niger near Karimama on 27 February 2008 (photographed: AG). On and near the coast there are a few reports in November to April (JG, BP, WP), with a maximum 35 at Lac Ahémé, of which most were moulting into breeding dress, on 28 February 2010 (BP, WP).

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

(+)

Seen in P.N. de la Pendjari on 26 and 28 March 2003 (J&SM), but not during other visits in January to March in other years. In P.N. du 'W' (Niger) the species has been reported in all months between November and July (Crisler *et al.* 2003).

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (+)

One at the Mékrou / Niger confluence on 23 February 2009 (photographed: AG). It had been reported at Agoué by Millet-Horsin (1923), but in the absence of a specimen the record was not accepted; this observer was not always reliable, claiming for example that he had proof of nest-building by Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Millet-Horsin 1921).

African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*

(+)

Present at Karimama, apparently at all seasons (photographed there by AG, on 29 October 2005: Fig. 8).



Figure 8. African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*, Karimama, Benin, 29 October 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Tourterelle riuse *Streptopelia roseogrisea*, Karimama, Bénin, 29 octobre 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus* (+)

A few records, from the coast (e.g. Porto Novo, on 5 August 2007: pers. obs.) north at least to Ouari Maro (Claffey 1995; J&SM). Observations include a juvenile begging from a Marsh Tchagra *Tchagra minutus* near Lokoli on 3 September 2003 (SF), a new host for this cuckoo (R. B. Payne *in litt.* 2009). Dowsett (1993) queried the specimen of *Coccytes cafer* in Oustalet (1898), and indeed it refers not to this species, but was the original name of Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii*.

African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus*

(+)

Several records, north to the Lama at 07°N (Waltert & Mühlenberg 1999; pers. obs.). Note that the name *Cuculus cupreus* Boddaert was

used in error in some old references (Sousa 1887, Oustalet 1898, Didier & Boudarel 1913, Bouet 1914), such records referring to Didric Cuckoo *C. caprius*.

Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster* (+)
Widespread at all forest localities visited in 2009, from Drabo Gbo to Lokoli (pers. obs.). Tape-recorded. Presumably confused with Senegal Coucal *C. senegalensis* by previous observers. Far more often heard than seen (seen once at close range at the Lama), this coucal has a deep, slow song and especially contact call (a rapid *doukdoukdoukdoukdouk...*) for which there is no equivalent in Senegal *C. senegalensis* or Blue-headed Coucals *C. monachus*. Especially common in Niaouli plateau forest, more scattered in Lama transition woodland and Pobè, and uncommon at Lokoli (where the understorey is generally too open). Common in the forests of the Dahomey Gap in Ghana and Togo, and on the Nigerian side of the border (Button 1967–68).

Vermiculated Fishing Owl *Scotopelia bouvieri* (+)

Apparently common in Lokoli swamp forest (pers. obs.), at the western limit of its range (a specimen is known from as far west as the Lagos area at 03°28'E: Elgood *et al.* 1994). A full song (seven notes) was heard before dawn, at 06.30 hrs, in flooded forest on the western bank on 7 February 2009; two different birds (including an immature, with descending call) were heard the next morning further away. After moving to the eastern bank on 8 February, two birds were heard countersinging from 05.30 to 06.40 hrs in the morning of 9 February, in wet forest with *Raphia* south of Lokoli village. Full songs (tape-recorded) included the typical introductory hoot followed by a series of 5–8 even notes, and the ending of one or two hoots (*cf.* Chappuis 2000).

Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* (+)

A bird which came to drink at the Mare Sacrée, P.N. de la Pendjari, was watched at close range (12 February 2010: pers. obs., J&SM), as were some 40 together with 700 Alpine Swifts *T. melba* at Mare Bali on 17 November 2010 (JG). Confirmatory photos were obtained on both occasions, but are too poor to publish.

Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*
Dowsett (1993) listed the species on the basis of an unpublished report by R. A. Cheke (*in litt.* 2009): this concerned a sighting of one at Déguédégué, near Malanville, on 25 October 1977 (RAC). This was doubtless a vagrant, as from northern Nigeria westwards records are north of 13°N (*Tauraco* database).

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* (+)

Two were watched closely on 4 February 2010 at Point Triple, P.N. du 'W' (pers. obs.). In the Niger side of the park there are only a few February and March records (Crisler *et al.* 2003). An April report further south in Benin (from Monts Kouffé: unpublished report in Claffey 1995) should be considered uncertain.

Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta* (+)

Discovered at two forest sites, Lokoli and Pobè, in 2009 (pers. obs.), with a few singing on a daily basis and apparently territorial (as tested using playback at Pobè). Tape-recorded. Button (1967–68) recorded it as common in the region of Ilaro, 40 km east of the Nigerian border. Listed from Pendjari-Arly (Balança *et al.* 2007), but this is no doubt a misidentification, as there is no rain forest there for this Guineo-Congolian species.

Willcocks's Honeyguide *Indicator willcocksii* (+)

Two singing just outside riparian forest near Agbassa on 21 February 2009 (pers. obs.). One was singing in a 26-m tall *Anogeissus*, and another 120 m away in a 28-m tall *Parkia biglobosa*; they were countersinging at 10.15–10.35 hrs; then the first moved to sing in a bare *Bombax costatum* (30 m tall). Well seen and tape-recorded. The habitat near Agbassa is very similar to that on the Konkori escarpment in Mole National Park (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2008). One seen at close range in a mixed-species flock in Niaouli plateau forest on 24 February 2009 (FDL).

Although usually associated with Guineo-Congolian secondary forest, this honeyguide extends into the transition zone and also into the Sudanian zone where it is not uncommon in riparian situations (at least from Chad west to Ghana).



Figure 9. European Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Didani, Benin, 23 January 2011 (Johannes & Sharon Merz)

Torcol fourmilier *Jynx torquilla*, Didani, Bénin, 23 janvier 2011 (Johannes & Sharon Merz)

European Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* (+)

One was seen and photographed at Didani, on 23 January 2011 (J&SM: Fig. 9).

Little Spotted (Green-backed) Woodpecker

Campethera cailliautii (+)

At least two singing in flooded forest at Lokoli in February 2009; one was tape-recorded (pers. obs.). In the forests of the transition zone in eastern Ghana, this woodpecker is normally found near water (pers. obs.). Listed from Pendjari-Arly (Balança *et al.* 2007), but in the absence of details of how it was distinguished from similar small woodpeckers, its occurrence so far north should not be accepted. Didier & Boudarel (1913) listed a specimen under the name *Chrysopicus permistus*, without locality, but in a collection obtained by Waterlot in Dahomey. P. Bousès (*in litt.* 2009) confirms that this specimen is in the MNHN and that it is indeed *C. cailliautii*, the label reading '15 janvier 1910, Dahomey'.

Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera nivos*

(+)

The calls of one bird (a slurred *wiurrrrr* lasting one second and descending in pitch, given three times) were tape-recorded in Pobè forest on 12 February 2009 (FDL). This was in a section of forest with dense understorey and the bird was not seen. There is an earlier unpublished observation by M. van den Akker (*in litt.* 2009) who mist-netted and photographed a female in Lama forest on 24 October 2002 (Fig. 10). As this woodpecker is very common in the dry forests of eastern Ghana



Figure 10. Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera nivos* mist-netted in Lama forest, Benin, 24 October 2002 (Maarten van den Akker)

Pic tacheté *Campethera nivos* capturé au filet dans la forêt de la Lama, Bénin, 24 octobre 2002 (Maarten van den Akker)



Figure 11. Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni* mist-netted in Lama forest, Benin, 27 February 2009 (Robert J. Dowsett)

Bulbul de Baumann *Phyllastrephus baumanni* capturé au filet dans la forêt de la Lama, Bénin, 27 février 2009 (Robert J. Dowsett)

it was to be expected in Benin, but the species appears to be quite rare. *C. nivos* is known from the Ilaro region 40 km east of the Nigerian border (Button 1967–68). Didier & Boudarel (1913) listed a specimen of *C. nivos*, without locality, in the Waterlot collection. P. Bousès (*in litt.* 2009) confirms that this specimen is in the MNHN and that it is indeed *C. nivos*, the label reading '15 janvier 1910, Dahomey'.

Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*

(+)

Common in Lama forest (on all layons visited, 11–15, and off 9), especially in transition woodland; including the denser forms (midway

between transition woodland and forest) (pers. obs.). As many as four were caught in one mist-net on layon 15 (Fig. 11), together with four White-throated Greenbuls *P. albigularis*. Quite vocal in February 2009, despite the drought, singing and calling a lot (tape-recorded several times). This bird is common in all of the dry forests of eastern Ghana as far as the Togo border, occurring low down in thickets under open canopy or in clearings (pers. obs.); east of Benin there are specimens from the Lagos area at 03°25'E (Fishpool 2000).

White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis* (+)

Locally common in a few forests between 06°44'N and 07°17'N: at Niaouli (van den Akker 2003a; pers. obs.), Lama (Waltert & Mühlenberg 1999; pers. obs.) and Pobè (pers. obs.). Absent from Lokoli, where the understorey appears too open. A sight record from Bégon (Brunel 1958) was considered by Dowsett (1993) to require confirmation, and those from north of 09°N (Claffey 1995, Grell *et al.* 2005, Balança *et al.* 2007) are certainly erroneous, for a species restricted to Guineo-Congolian vegetation.

White-tailed Ant Thrush *Neocossyphus poensis* (+)

See next species.



Figure 12. White-tailed Ant Thrush *Neocossyphus poensis* mist-netted in Pobè forest, Benin, 21 May 2003 (Maarten van den Akker)

Néocossyphe à queue blanche *Neocossyphus poensis* capturé au filet dans la forêt de Pobè, Bénin, 21 mai 2003 (Maarten van den Akker)

Finsch's Flycatcher Thrush *Stizorhina finschi* (+)

At least two encountered in Lokoli swamp forest in 2009; they were located by their characteristic loud calls *ruit-ruit-ruit* or *wreet wreet wreet*, which were tape-recorded (pers. obs.). Both individuals were moving through the forest and did not appear to be holding a territory. One seen in the same area on 14 November 2010 (JG). New for Benin, but possibly just wanderers. Didier & Boudarel (1913) listed a specimen of *Cassinia finschi*, without locality, in the Waterlot collection. P. Boussès (*in litt.* 2009) confirms that there is a specimen in the MNHN labelled thus and that it does seem to be *S. finschi*. The label reads '25 Xbre 1910, Loc.: Porto-Novo', though it might be speculated if Waterlot did not obtain it elsewhere (Porto-Novo merely being where he was stationed).

Not recorded at Pobè in February 2009; T. Loubegnon (pers. comm.) described to us a 'White-tailed Ant Thrush *Neocossyphus poensis*' he watched with M. van den Akker (mentioned in van den Akker & Claffey 2004) as feeding in the mid-stratum (midway between the ground and canopy), snatching prey on tree trunks and also flycatching. This fits a *Stizorhina* far better than a *Neocossyphus*, and the two can be confused on general plumage characters. However, M. van den Akker (*in litt.* 2009) did mist-net and photograph a *Neocossyphus* in Pobè, on 21 May 2003 (Fig. 12), a fact not mentioned in his paper. As ant thrushes require very large territories in sheltered forest with deep shade, the forest at Pobè appears both unsuitable and far too small for the species to become established there. It can be no more than an irregular vagrant from the Nigerian side. In the 1960s at least, both White-tailed Ant Thrush and Finsch's Flycatcher Thrush were common in Ilaro Forest Reserve 40 km east of Pobè (Button 1967–68).

Rufous Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* (+)

One was well seen in P.N. de la Pendjari, on 25–27 January 2007 (J&SM). Claffey (1995) reported seeing one near Bétérou, on 26 December 1992, which is considerably further south than one might expect this species typical of the Sahel, and we prefer to treat the latter record as uncertain.

Rufous-tailed (Common) Rock Thrush

Monticola saxatilis (+)

One in non-breeding plumage was present on rocky terrain on the east side of the road between Djougou and Natitingou on 17 January 1999 (PMC & MC).

Greater Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus rufescens*

(+)

Seen and heard in a few places in mangrove and adjacent *Typha* and *Phragmites* beds at Togbin and Ouidah, on 22–24 January 2009 (pers. obs.), at Grand-Popo, e.g. on 4 February 2010 (AF *et al.*) and Plaine du Sô, on 17 February 2010 (BP).

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (+)

SM had very good views of one in a mango tree by her house at Cobly, on 7 January 2010. It was obviously a warbler, about the same size as a Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* present nearby, uniformly grey with a black cap, and thus a male. It is a species she knows well from Europe. Claffey (1998) reported this species at Bétérou, on 23 March 1997, on the basis of a 'flock of some 10–12 birds in a thicket, all apparently of the same species', but these numbers seem remarkable.

Black-backed Cisticola *Cisticola eximius* (+)

Two were observed closely, perched in grassland near Mare Fogou, P.N. de la Pendjari, on 13 February 2010 (pers. obs.). J&SM saw and heard some at Nanagadé, near Cobly, on 28 December 2010 (Fig. 13). One was seen in the Natitingou area, on 16 November 2010 (JG). Salewski (2007b) corrected the earlier claim from Pendjari



Figure 13. Black-backed Cisticola *Cisticola eximius*, Nanakadé, Benin, 28 December 2010 (Johannes & Sharon Merz)

Cisticole à dos noir *Cisticola eximius*, Nanakadé, Bénin, 28 décembre 2010 (Johannes & Sharon Merz)

by Salewski & Korb (2007) as a misidentification, but his suggestion that the species might be found in northern Benin in time is confirmed.

Rufous Cisticola *Cisticola rufus* (+)

Two singles feeding on the ground among short fresh grass in tall woodland near Agbassa on 21 February 2009 (FDL). Very small, plain rufous-brown above. Near Cobly a singing bird was observed 6 June 2010 by J&SM, who compared the song to Chappuis (2000).

Red-cheeked Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophya blissetti*

(+)

Several in dense thickets in semi-closed forest along layon 15 at Lama (pers. obs.). Tape-recorded and mist-netted (Fig. 14). This species was singing rather little in February 2009, and is probably more widespread than found to date in Lama forest. Common in the region of Ilaro, 40 km east of the Nigerian border (Button 1967–68).



Figure 14. Red-cheeked Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophya blissetti* mist-netted in Lama forest, Benin, 1 March 2009 (Robert J. Dowsett)

Priit de Blissett *Dyaphorophya blissetti* capturé au filet dans la forêt de la Lama, Bénin, 1 mars 2009 (Robert J. Dowsett)

Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus* (+)

Tape-recorded at Bembéréké on 19 February 1969 (Chappuis 2000; C. Chappuis *in litt.* 2009). Reportedly seen in 1977 at Natitingou (AAG).

Little Green Sunbird *Anthreptes seimundi* (+)

A group of five watched at close range feeding on the red flowers of the liane *Combretum racemosum*, at the edge of bas-fond (swamp) forest, at Niaouli,

on 28 January 2009 (FDL). Identified by their small size, olivaceous colour tinged with yellow on the belly, only slightly decurved bill and pale eye-ring; they were giving thin but sharp *tsi* or *tsip* calls, characteristic of the species. In Ghana, where the species is widespread, *C. racemosum* is its favourite food plant in the dry season, when these lianes are in full flower. East of Benin, Button (1967–68) reported it from Ilaro, 40 km east of the Nigerian border.

Tiny Sunbird *Cinnyris minullus* (+)

Several pairs in the midstorey and at edges in Pobè forest in February 2009 (pers. obs.). One pair well seen (female greyer below than Olive-bellied Sunbird *C. chloropygius*) and song tape-recorded, the song being weaker and sweeter than that of Olive-bellied Sunbird. Frequently singing in the early morning, in trees or lianes at heights of 10–25 m above the ground. A tape-recording from near Cotonou (Chappuis 2000) is not typical of *C. minullus*, and is more probably from *C. chloropygius*. In Nigeria there is a specimen from Badagri (06°25'N 02°53'E), close to the Benin border, near the coast (Elgood *et al.* 1994).

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (+)

Seen near Batia on 17 March 2008 (J&SM), a male near Tchaourou on 17 February 2009 (pers. obs.) and a female at Grand-Popo on 12 November 2010 (JG). In each case the possibility of African Golden Oriole *O. auratus* was excluded.

Emin's Shrike *Lanius gubernator* (+)

Two in dry scrub near inselbergs on the road between Ouari Maro and Bassila on 16 January 1999 (PMC & MC) and a single, probably from the same pair, was there again on 6 March 1999 (PMC). A female seen and a poor photograph obtained, in woodland in the zone de chasse de la Mékrou, on 10 February 2010 (pers. obs.).

Marsh Tchagra *Tchagra minutus* (+)

A pair seen 8 km north of Ouari Maro on 16 February 1998 (PMC). A male with a begging juvenile cuckoo, believed to be a Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus*, at Lokoli on 3 September 2003 (SF).



Figure 15. Chestnut-bellied Starling *Lamprotornis pulcher*, Karimama, Benin, March 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Merle métallique à ventre roux *Lamprotornis pulcher*, Karimama, Bénin, mars 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Chestnut-bellied Starling *Lamprotornis pulcher* (+)

A group observed along the road from Tanguiéta to Porga in April 1996 (PMC). Seen in Pendjari on 18 March 2008 (J&SM). There are also reports from the central Atacora in July (ML), Bello Tounga, near Karimama, in August and March 2005 (AG, photographed: Fig. 15) and Malanville in February–March (year unknown: CdV & IvW).

Speckle-fronted Weaver *Sporopipes frontalis* (+)

Several observations of small groups at Bello Tounga, near Karimama, where first seen in August 2003, and in December and February in subsequent years (photographed by AG: Fig. 16). A record in Claffey (1995) is erroneous (P. M. Claffey *in litt.* 2008).



Figure 16. Speckle-fronted Weaver *Sporopipes frontalis*, Karimama, Benin, August 2009 (Agnès Giannotti)

Moineau quadrillé *Sporopipes frontalis*, Karimama, Bénin, mars 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)



Figure 17. Pair of Slender-billed Weavers *Ploceus pelzelni*, Ouidah, Benin, 4 February 2010 (Alain Fossé)

Tisserin de Pelzeln *Ploceus pelzelni*, un couple à Ouidah, Bénin, 4 février 2010 (Alain Fossé)

Slender-billed Weaver *Ploceus pelzelni* (+)

Not uncommon along the coast, from Grand-Popo (J&SM) and Ouidah (pers. obs.; photographed by AF *et al.*), inland to the Plaine du Sô (pers. obs., BP *et al.*: Fig. 17). Didier & Boudarel (1913) listed a female specimen identified as *Sitagra monacha*, without locality, in the Waterlot collection. P. Boussès (*in litt.* 2009) confirms that this specimen is in the MNHN and is labelled '15 janvier 1910, Dahomey'.

Fan-tailed Widowbird (Whydah) *Euplectes axillaris* (+)

Douaud (1955: 302) described seeing the species in a marsh near Malanville, on 11 August 1953, apparently on the Benin side of the Niger—which reference was overlooked by Dowsett (1993). Ouidah is the type locality of the Yellow-mantled Widowbird *E. macroura*, and the English name whydah should be applied to those birds and not the long-tailed parasitic widows *Vidua*.

Red-collared Widowbird (Whydah) *Euplectes ardens* (+)

Douaud (1955: 305) reported seeing a 'superbe Ouidah noir' of the race *concolor* at Natitingou, on 14 August 1953—which reference was overlooked by Dowsett (1993). A small flock of non-breeders near Ouari Maro, in rank growth outside forest in the valley below Soubakpérou hill, on 19 February 2009 (pers. obs.), were considered very probably this species. They were watched at close range: wings almost black, back strongly marked and more contrasting than in Northern Red Bishop *E. franciscanus*, breast richly buff, and call a thin *see* or *tsee*.



Figure 18. Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba*, Karimama, Benin, August 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Beaumarquet melba *Pytilia melba*, Karimama, Bénin, août 2005 (Agnès Giannotti)

Pale-fronted Negrofinch *Nigrita luteifrons* (+)

A pair in *Elaeis* palms just outside Pobè forest, calling (tape-recorded), on 12 February 2009, and a pair in a fruiting *Ficus thonningii* inside forest on 14 February 2009 (pers. obs.); the contact call of this species, a descending series of soft whistles, is diagnostic. Button (1967–68) who knew the species from Ilaro (40 km east of the Nigerian border), also mentioned this descending sequence.

Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba* (+)

Photographed at Bello Tounga, Karimama, in August 2005 (AG ; Fig. 18). Its parasite is Sahel Paradise Widow *Vidua orientalis* (known from the same locality).

Blue-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta rubricata* (+)

Payne (1982) and Dowsett (1993) suggested that this species needed confirmation in Benin, its occurrence then being based solely on a sighting from Pendjari-Arly (Green & Sayer 1979). We now know that it occurs in rank growth on the edge of forest in the area of Agbassa-Ouari Maro-Bétérou (Claffey 1995; pers. obs.). It has also been reported further south, at Niaouli (van den Akker 2003a).

Zebra Waxbill *Amandava subflava* (+)

Several flocks of up to 15 on the Plaine du Sô in April and May (2010: BP, WP), 20 observed at Bétérou on 12 February 1996 (PMC) and ten in grassland just outside Lokoli forest on 5 February 2009 (pers. obs.). Further north, in February 2010, a dozen in the Pendjari on plains near Mare Fogou and Mare Tiabiga, and some at Batia (pers. obs., J&SM). An earlier record, by Bouet

(1914), from Agouagon near the Ouémé River, was overlooked by Dowsett (1993).

Barka Indigobird *Vidua larvaticola* (+)

A male in breeding plumage was seen on 6 February 2010 near Mare 25, P.N. du 'W', in association with its host Black-faced Firefinch *Lagonosticta larvata* (pers. obs.). Two males thought to be this species were near Cobly on 30 August 2009 (J&SM).

Pale-winged (Wilson's) Indigobird *Vidua wilsoni* (+)

Confirmed from P.N. de la Pendjari, where imitating calls of its host Bar-breasted Firefinch *Lagonosticta rufopicta* in February 2010 (FDL). Reported from Bétérou by Claffey (1995), but without details of how identified and he did not report the host species.

Sahel Paradise Whydah (Widow) *Vidua orientalis* (+)

A male was photographed in August 2004 at Karimama (AG: Fig. 19), where its host Green-winged Pytilia is known. A specimen of 'Steganura paradisea aucupum' was reported from Agouagon (Bouet 1914)—this is what is now known as *V. orientalis*, but its host does not occur in southern Benin, and Exclamatory or Togo Paradise Whydah is more likely. Note that the name whydah is more correctly applied to the long-tailed *Euplectes* species (see *E. axillaris* above).



Figure 19. Sahel Paradise Whydah *Vidua orientalis*, Karimama, Benin, August 2004 (Agnès Giannotti)

Veuve à collier d'or *Vidua orientalis*, Karimama, Bénin, août 2004 (Agnès Giannotti)

Exclamatory Paradise Whydah (Widow) *Vidua interjecta* (+)

Many in breeding plumage were present in P.N. du 'W', in February 2010, with photographs taken and dropped tail feathers collected (pers.



Figure 20. Exclamatory Paradise Whydah *Vidua interjecta*, P.N. du 'W', Benin, January 2007 (Agnès Giannotti)

Veuve d'Uelle *Vidua interjecta*, P.N. du 'W', Bénin, janvier 2007 (Agnès Giannotti)

obs.), and the species was also photographed there by AG in January 2007 (Fig. 20). Birds seen at various places in the north-west were thought by J&SM to be this species, from Pendjari south to the Cobly area. Similarly, birds identified as *V. interjecta* in breeding plumage were seen in the southern Borgou in October–January (PMC). Its host Red-winged Pytilia *Pytilia phoenicoptera* is common in northern Benin, occurring south to Bétérou (Claffey 1995).

Togo Paradise Whydah (Widow) *Vidua togoensis* (+)

A male in partial breeding plumage in the Pendjari, at the Campement des Eléphants, on 14 February 2010, with characteristic yellow nape, was considered to be this species (RJD). Its host, Yellow-winged Pytilia *Pytilia hypogrammica*, is not yet known with certainty in Benin, although it has been listed from the Pendjari (Delvingt *et al.* 1989, Grell *et al.* 2005).

White-rumped Seedeater *Serinus leucopygius* (+)

Seen occasionally between January and March (in 2003, 2005, 2007) in P.N. de la Pendjari (J&SM). Listed, without comment, from Niaouli (van den Akker 2003a), certainly in error, as this is a northern species of dry country.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* (+)

One found in rocky hills near Cobly on 14 November 2009 (SM). A bunting seen in good light, with its yellow submoustachial stripe contrasting with the otherwise uniformly grey head and the cinnamon breast. It was thought to be a male. The observer had become familiar with the species in Cyprus earlier in the year.

Species (not listed above) for which an acceptable record has been published since Dowsett (1993)

Since the publication of Dowsett (1993) there have been 58 published additions to the country avifauna. A few additional species in these works are considered to require confirmation, and are listed in the next section.

- Claffey (1995): Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Lesser Moorhen *G. angulata*, Leaflove *Pyrrhurus scandens*, Yellow-bellied Hyliota *Hyliota flavigaster*, Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Grey-headed Oliveback *Nesocharis capistrata*, Cabanis's Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi*.
- Anciaux (1996): White-crested Tiger Heron *Tigriornis leucolopha*, White-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura pulchra*, Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Forest Chestnut-winged Starling *Onychognathus fulgidus*, Black-bellied Seedcracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus*.
- Claffey (1997): Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*.
- Claffey (1999b): Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*.
- Waltert & Mühlenberg (1999): Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis*, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike *Campephaga quiscalina*, Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris*, Slender-billed Greenbul *A. gracilirostris*, Red-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda syndactylus*, Forest Robin *Stiphornis erythrothorax*, Green Hylia *Hylia prasina*, Buff-throated Apalis *Apalis rufogularis*, Fraser's Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria ocreata*, Shrike Flycatcher *Megabyas flammulatus*, Chestnut Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophyia castanea*, Puvél's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puvéli*, Purple-headed Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis purpureiceps*, Yellow-mantled Weaver *Ploceus tricolor*, Western Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina*.
- van den Akker (2003a): Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus*, Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti*, Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis*, Naked-faced Barbet *Gymnobucco calvus*, Spotted Honeyguide *Indicator maculatus*, Honeyguide Greenbul *Baeopogon indicator*, Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus*, European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, Melodious

Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*, Rufous-crowned Eremomela *Eremomela badiceps*, Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*, Yellow-browed Camaroptera *Camaroptera superciliaris*, Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Tithylia *Pholidornis ruschiae*, Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch *Nigrita bicolor*.

- van den Akker (2003b): Yellow-whiskered Greenbul *Andropadus latirostris*, Western Bearded Greenbul *Criniger barbatus*, White-browed Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria cinerascens*.
- Crisler *et al.* (2003): Horus Swift *Apus horus*.
- van Muyen (2005): Common Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.
- van Muyen (2006): Dunlin *Calidris alpina*.
- Salewski & Korb (2007): Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Ayres's Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresii*, Dorst's Cisticola *Cisticola guinea*.
- Jones (2008): Brown Sunbird *Anthreptes gabonicus*, Reichenbach's Sunbird *Nectarinia reichenbachii*, Orange Weaver *Ploceus auran-tius*. Brown Sunbird and the weaver were not claimed to be new, but unpublished reports from the Lama and the Upper Ouémé River, respectively, appear to have been misidentified.
- Merz & Merz (2010): Streaky-breasted Flufftail *Sarothrura boehmi*.
- Manners (2010): Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*.

The great majority of the forest species listed above were also recorded by us in 2009 (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2009).

Of those 176 species listed for Benin by Dowsett (1993) on the basis of reports from the Pendjari-Arly transborder park (Green & Sayer 1979), which gave no indication of which country, nearly all have subsequently been confirmed to occur in the Benin sector (see, e.g., Salewski 2007a, van der Spek 2008) or elsewhere in the country. Those that cannot yet be accepted for Benin are listed below along with other species requiring confirmation.

Species whose presence on the Benin list is considered erroneous

Species that had been accepted in the 1993 Benin list (Dowsett 1993) are indicated (-).

Corn Crake *Crex crex*

Libois (1995) reported seeing this species in some numbers in southern Benin, but subsequently corrected his identification to Black Coucal *Centropus grillii* (Libois 1996: 63).

Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus*

According to Bouet (1914), this species was reportedly very rare in the forest region north of Sakété. He saw birds in captivity said to have originated from this region. However, Dändliker (1992) demonstrated the lack of historical evidence for a wild population in the Dahomey region. Feral groups of up to seven are often seen in Cotonou, such birds showing the characters of nominate *erithacus* (B. Portier *in litt.* 2010).

Square-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus fossii*

A female specimen from Porto-Novo, taken on 3 September 1910 (Didier & Boudarel 1913) must be a misidentification, as the species occurs no nearer than Gabon.

White-bellied Kingfisher *Alcedo leucogaster*

Van den Akker (2003a) thought he saw one in a teak tree on the edge of secondary forest at Niaouli. The habitat there is quite unsuitable (pers. obs.), and we suspect the bird was an African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ceyx pictus*. If this species of streams in the forest interior were to occur in the remnants in southern Benin, van den Akker would surely have mist-netted one during the considerable amount of time he spent ringing.

Black Bee-eater *Merops gularis*

Anciaux (1996) reported it in the bas-fond of Niaouli forest. However, the species was not seen in good conditions (a distant group of bee-eaters against the light, M.-R. Anciaux *in litt.* 2009) and it would be more prudent to consider the presence of this species in Benin as unproven, as no-one else has been able to confirm it.

Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *Tockus camurus*

A single female was reported from an area of old secondary forest, 5 km east of Bétérou, on 19 October 1998 (Claffey 1999a). This is in an area of essentially Sudanian vegetation, so we believe this to be a misidentification—this hornbill is restricted to the Guineo-Congolian forests and is absent from the Dahomey Gap. It is so vocal that

it would have been noticed in the forest remnants of southern Benin, were it to occur in the country.

White-thighed Hornbill *Bycanistes albotibialis* (-) and **Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill** *B. subcylindricus* (-)

Claffey (1995, based on an unpublished report by A. A. Green & J. A. Sayer) regards Brown-cheeked *Bycanistes cylindricus* as 'abundant', as opposed to 'rare' for the common Piping Hornbill *B. fistulator*. In mapping this record, Borrow & Demey (2001) assumed it to refer to the Lower Guinea endemic White-thighed Hornbill *B. albotibialis*, now considered a different species. Whether it is claimed to be this or the Upper Guinea endemic *B. cylindricus*, a hornbill of wet rain forest cannot possibly be 'abundant' in an area of essentially Sudanian woodland, and we have to assume there was confusion with another hornbill, probably Piping, which is common in the Ouari-Marou to Bétérou area. Similarly, doubt can be attached to the status of Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill, based on sightings by the same observers.

Yellow-casqued Hornbill *Ceratogymna elata*

A. Kemp (*in Fry et al.* 1988) lists the species from Benin, but this is in error for Benin City, Mid-West State, Nigeria (Mason 1940).

Yellow-spotted Barbet *Buccanodon duchaillui*

Van den Akker (2003a) lists this species in the appendix to his Niaouli list without any details, even though it is quite unknown in Benin. This species' occurrence is most unlikely, and it appears to be absent from the Dahomey Gap (pers. obs.).

Yellow-streaked Greenbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*

Listed from the Pendjari by Grell *et al.* (2005), this eastern African, montane forest species cannot possibly occur.

Fire-crested Alethe *Alethe diademata*

Claimed in March 1999 (JGoo *in Bull. ABC* 13: 99). No locality was given, but it was in Ouari Marou (P. M. Claffey *in litt.* 2008). Were this Guineo-Congolian forest species to occur in Benin, it would surely be in more suitable vegetation in the south. However, no-one has located it there, and the vagrant status of other forest Turdidae

such as Finsch's Flycatcher Thrush (see above) suggests that even the southern forests are too dry for this ant-following specialist.

Red-pate Cisticola *Cisticola ruficeps* (-)

Holyoak & Seddon (1990) reported seeing this species at 10°25'N 02°44'E (i.e. near Gamia). This Sahel species does not occur this far west in the Sudanian zone (Dowsett-Lemaire *et al.* 2005), and the species concerned was possibly Dorst's Cisticola *C. guinea*.

Cassin's Flycatcher *Muscicapa cassini*

Reported from the Ouémé River at Bétérou (Claffey 1995) and the Tapoa River in P.N. du 'W' (Crisler *et al.* 2003). This is a species of broad rivers in the Guineo-Congolian forest zone, and observations outside that area are either of Swamp Flycatcher *M. aquatica* or Ashy Flycatcher *M. caerulescens*. Its occurrence in P.N. du 'W' (Balança *et al.* 2007) is highly improbable.

Dusky-blue Flycatcher *Muscicapa comitata*

Reported from Toffo by Anciaux (1996), but the habitat (mango trees near habitation) (M.-R. Anciaux *in litt.* 2009) suggests that it was not this forest-associated species but some other small, grey flycatcher.

Bioko Batis *Batis poensis*

The specimen reportedly collected by Brunel (1958) at Bégon (Kétou region), and considered to require confirmation by Dowsett (1993), has disappeared from the MNHN (E. Pasquet *in litt.* 2009). As it came from a habitat described as 'savane arborée', it could have been a Senegal Batis *B. senegalensis*, which is widespread throughout the country. There is much degraded savanna between Kétou and Pobè (pers. obs.), and the observation of Bioko Batis on the edge of forest at Pobè mentioned by van den Akker & Claffey (2004) should not be accepted in the absence of a convincing description. Senegal Batis occurs on the edge of the forest zone at Lama, for example (pers. obs.). C. Erard (*in Urban et al.* 1997) cited Bégon for Bioko Batis, but does not recall seeing the specimen, and agrees that its presence in Benin remains unproven (C. Erard *in litt.* 2009). It is unknown from the whole of the Dahomey Gap, including from eastern Ghana (pers. obs.).

Rufous-winged Illadopsis *Illadopsis rufescens*

A bird mist-netted and photographed in Niaouli forest on 7 June 2001 (van den Akker 2003a) was not this species but Puvel's Illadopsis *I. puveli*. The colours are wrong for the richly rufous *I. rufescens*, which is completely absent from the dry forests of the Dahomey Gap, where it is replaced by *I. puveli*.

Capuchin Babbler *Phyllanthus atripennis* (-)

Dowsett (1993) included this species on the basis of the mention of 'Dahomey' by Bannerman (1953), but no supporting record has been traced. Subsequent reports lack confirmatory details (Delvingt *et al.* 1989, Claffey 1995).

Violet-tailed Sunbird *Anthreptes aurantium*

Recorded by Bouet (1914) at Agouagon and Savé. This claim is certainly erroneous as the species has not been recorded west of south-west Cameroon. A specimen claimed from Ondo (07°05'N 04°51'E), in southern Nigeria, was a misidentification of Western Violet-backed Sunbird *A. longuemarei* (Elgood 1982). This suggests that some other records in Bouet (1914) should also be treated with caution.

Blue-throated Brown Sunbird *Cyanomitra cyanolaema*

Based on a female from Adjacin (Oustalet 1898), but misidentified and not accepted by subsequent authorities.

Johanna's Sunbird *Cinnyris johannae*

The type locality of the race *fasciata* (Jardine & Fraser 1852) was said to be West Africa, and was restricted to Abomey by Shelley (1876: 199), on the basis that the whole collection referred to was 'chiefly' from that locality. Abomey is in Dahomey (i.e. Benin, not Nigeria, as in White 1963). However, the occurrence of this forest species in the savanna zone is inherently unlikely, and the specimen could have come from elsewhere in Upper Guinea.

Western Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus brachyrhynchus*

Reported from Niaouli and Lama, but confused with Black-winged Oriole *O. nigripennis* by Waltert & Mühlenberg (1999) and van den Akker (2003a). Anciaux (1996) on the other

hand correctly listed only Black-winged Oriole for Niaouli, and Brunel (1958) found it 'assez commun' in forest, and collected several in the Pobè region; he failed to find Black-headed Oriole in the country. A specimen reported by Didier & Boudarel (1913) as *O. larvatus*, without locality, in the Waterlot collection, is also *O. nigripennis* (P. Boussès *in litt.* 2009); it is labelled '15 janvier 1910, Dahomey' like other specimens obtained by Waterlot, which suggests this may be the date they were consigned or assembled, and not necessarily collected then.

The characteristic disyllabic contact call of birds in Benin was tape-recorded at Niaouli, Lokoli and Pobè, as well as several song types. Individuals seen at close range many times, with or without playback, and always definitely identified as *O. nigripennis* (pers. obs.). Possibly Waltert & Mühlenberg confused the pale spot on the wing with the pale alula (present in *O. nigripennis*), but from their description of the voice, it is clear we are dealing with a single species. Western Black-headed Oriole is found in wetter, less disturbed forest in the Guineo-Congolian region.

Sooty Boubou *Laniarius leucorhynchus*

Reported from Niaouli by van den Akker (2003a), who wrote 'behaviour closer to that of a true shrike', but Sooty Boubous do not behave like true shrikes and seek the densest understorey near the ground. They are noisy however, singing in a duet. FDL listened for them and played pre-recorded tapes at Niaouli (plateau) without success. The occurrence of this Guineo-Congolian endemic in the P.N. de la Pendjari (Grell *et al.* 2005) is quite impossible.

Black-crowned Waxbill *Estrilda nonnula*

A sight record from Bétérou by Claffey (1995)—far from the nearest records in the montane grasslands of eastern Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994)—is obviously an error of identification or concerned an escaped cagebird.

Although the status of birds in northern Benin will be dealt with at a later date, it should be mentioned here that the following species reported from 'W' and/or Pendjari-Arly National Parks (Balança *et al.* 2007) are certainly in error, regardless of which side of the international border they are supposed to occur: Afep Pigeon *Columba*

unicincta, Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx vexillarius*, Green-throated Sunbird *Chalcomitra rubescens*, Crimson Seedcracker *Pyrenestes sanguineus*, Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* and Variable Indigobird *Vidua funerea*.

Species whose presence in Benin requires confirmation

Another 28 species require confirmation, most of them because published details are insufficient to be sure of their identification, or in the absence of an indication as to which side of international borders they have been reported. Dowsett (1993) had accepted species listed from Pendjari-Arly (Benin / Burkina Faso), and most have indeed since been found to occur in Benin, the exceptions (including others listed by Grell *et al.* 2005) being included below. Species accepted in 1993 but now discounted are marked (-).

- Bouet (1914): Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*.
- Brunel (1958): Chestnut-capped Flycatcher *Erythrocerus mccallii*.
- Dowsett (1993): Common Teal *Anas crecca* (-), Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius* (-), Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* (-), Quail-plover *Ortyxelos meiffrenii* (-), Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* (-).
- Claffey (1995): White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Magpie Mannikin *Spermestes fringilloides*.
- Dodman & Taylor (1996): Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*.
- Claffey (1999b): Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*.
- Claffey (2003): Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis*.
- van den Akker (2003a): Cassin's Honeybird *Prodotiscus insignis*, Violet-backed Hyliota *Hyliota violacea*, Ussher's Flycatcher *Muscicapa ussheri*, White-breasted Negrofinch *Nigrita fusconotus*.
- Grell *et al.* (2005), Balança *et al.* (2007): Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, European Scops Owl *Otus scops*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (-), Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* (-), Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (-), Western

Bonelli's Warbler *P. bonelli*, Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*, Neumann's (Red-winged) Starling *Onychognathus (morio) neumanni*, Yellow-winged Pytilia *Pytilia hypogrammica* (-).

Conclusion

This paper adds 74 species to the Benin list and lists another 58 whose records have been published between 1993 and the present. Together with species accepted on the list of Dowsett (1993), including those listed from a transfrontier park and since confirmed, we now accept a total of 542 species from Benin. As, in our opinion, no fewer than 56 claimed species should be rejected or require confirmation, much remains to be clarified regarding the status and distribution of birds in the country. We hope to present a detailed synthesis in a few years time, when further field work has been completed, especially in the little-known northern half of Benin. A description of study sites and an annotated list of the 336 species observed by FDL and RJD in 2009 in south-central Benin is available as a pdf (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2009) on request, as is a report on the 253 species found in the northern national parks, 'W' and Pendjari (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2010). It is hoped both will eventually be posted on the ABC website.

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Le Pouget, 30440 Sumène, France. E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com

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Appendix 1. Coordinates of Benin localities mentioned

Abomey	07°11'N 01°59'E
Adjacin	06°29'N 02°35'E
Agbassa	08°49'N 02°17'E
Agouagon near the Ouémé River	07°59'N 02°18'E
Agoué	06°16'N 01°13'E
Batia	10°54'N 01°30'E
Bégon	07°17'N 02°29'E
Bembéréké	10°13'N 02°40'E
Bétérou	09°12'N 02°16'E
Bodjécali	11°51'N 03°22'E
Bouches du Roi	06°17'N 01°56'E
Boukoubé	10°11'N 01°06'E
Campement des Eléphants, P.N. de la Pendjari	11°16'N 01°16'E
Chutes de Koudou, P.N. du 'W'	11°39'N 02°15'E
Cobly	10°29'N 01°01'E
Cotonou	06°21'N 02°26'E
Datori	10°24'N 00°47'E
Didani	10°29'N 00°59'E
Djougou	09°42'N 01°40'E
Forêt Classée de l'Ouémé Supérieur	c.09°25'N 02°15'E
Forêt Classée de la Lama	06°59'N 02°07'E
Gamia	10°24'N 02°44'E
Grand-Popo	06°16'N 01°50'E
Guézin	06°24'N 01°57'E
Karimama	12°04'N 03°11'E
Kofouno	12°00'N 03°05'E
Kountori, Atacora	10°24'N 00°57'E
lac Ahémé	06°23'N 01°56'E
lac Nokoué	06°29'N 02°25'E
Malanville	11°52'N 03°23'E
Mare 25, P.N. du 'W'	11°54'N 02°56'E
Mare Bali, P.N. de la Pendjari	11°12'N 01°31'E
Mare Fogou, P.N. de la Pendjari	11°26'N 01°35'E
Mare Sacrée, P.N. de la Pendjari	11°28'N 01°28'E
Mare Tiabiga, P.N. de la Pendjari	11°25'N 01°43'E
Mékrou outfall	12°24'N 02°49'E
Mékrou Tounga, Monsey district	c.12°25'N 02°50'E
Monts Kouffé	08°43'N 01°51'E
Nanakadé	10°26'N 00°53'E
Natitingou, plateau Somba	10°19'N 01°22'E
Niaouli plateau forest	06°44'N 02°08'E
Nikki	09°56'N 03°12'E
Ouidah lagoon	06°20'N 02°05'E
Plaine du Sô	06°30'N 02°23'E
Pobè	06°58'N 02°40'E
Point Triple, P.N. du 'W'	11°54'N 02°24'E
Porga	11°03'N 00°58'E
Sakété	06°43'N 02°40'E
Savé	08°02'N 02°29'E
Sota outfall	11°52'N 03°23'E
Tanguiéta	10°37'N 01°16'E
Toffo	06°51'N 02°05'E
Zimvo (Zinvié)	06°37'N 02°21'E
zone de chasse de la Mékrou	11°20'N 02°02'E